WORLD CHRONICLE

UNITED NATIONS

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PROGRAMME: **"WORLD CHRONICLE"**

GUEST: Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

JOURNALISTS: Bhaskar Menon, PTI-TV, India
Evgueni Menkes, TASS
Tuyet Nguyen, UPI

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

UNHCR

Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, discusses how, at the present time, her office protects and assists seventeen million or more refugees and displaced persons around the world. UNHCR relies heavily on voluntary contributions, Mrs. Ogata says, and expresses her satisfaction with international response to the needs of the world's refugees. She hopes that the emerging new world order will help to alleviate their plight.

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VOICE From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

Throughout history, people have been uprooted against their will, fleeing injustice and persecution. In the last few decades, wars, civil strife and natural disasters have caused unprecedented massive displacement of people. Today, there are millions of refugees and displaced persons scattered around the globe.

Our guest today, Mrs Sadako Ogata is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Her office is known as UNHCR. A national of Japan, Mrs. Ogata will be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Bhaskar Menon of PTI-TV of India; Evgueni Menkes of TASS and; Tuyet Nguyen of United Press International.

Before we begin our discussion, let's look at one example of what UNHCR is doing to address the refugee situation.

Our correspondent Lelei Lelaulu reports:

LELAULU: "More than 10,000 metric tonnes of food per month are now reaching Ethiopia and the Sudan. Compounding the problem, over a million Somali and Sudanese refugees flooded the country. With widespread drought and its just-ended civil war, Ethiopia's eight million people are still in desperate need of food.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, recently toured refugee centres in east and west Ethiopia. She personally assessed the camps' urgent needs. She was heartened to see feeding centres are in place. And some skills have been put to good use. But in some places, violence has taken its toll.

One such camp is Itang, western Ethiopia. Once the largest refugee centre in Africa, factional fighting drove away its 400,000 Sudanese occupants. They ended up in marshes back to the Sudan without food or shelter. Now that order has been restored, the refugees are trickling back. Signs of their ordeal are evident, especially on the children.

VOX POP:
"There is an influx of 600 to 700 per day".
...."Everyday, so we have to be really prepared".

LELAULU: Throughout 1991, the mass movement in the Horn of Africa has been unprecedented. Twenty-two million people are in desperate need of help. An appeal was once again launched by the UN Secretary-General for 400 million dollars to meet emergency needs till the end of the year. At the same time, steps are being taken to assist the various factions to end their civil conflicts.

SECRETARY GENERAL:
"I have asked Under-Secretary-General Jonah to

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assume a special role in addressing the political problems, which are at the root of the crisis in the region, with the authorities concerned".

LELAULU:
Combining peacemaking with humanitarian assistance is the goal of UN efforts. With generous help from international donors this year, famine can still be averted in the Horn of Africa.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Ogata, we've just seen one example of the problem. It's a problem which I suppose is so pervasive that it affects very many countries and I wonder if you could give us an estimate of the number of refugees and the number of countries affected, and what sort of operations you are engaged in through your office?

OGATA: In the Horn of Africa? All over the world? All over the world, the estimate is some 17 million people but Africa alone has some 5-6 million people who are refugees. And then there is, on top of the refugees, people who are displaced within the countries, almost equal in number.

LITTLEJOHNS: And what about in Asia? We've heard a lot concerning the boat people, for example.

OGATA: Asia, the large refugee outflows are from Afghanistan - 5 million or so still in Pakistan and in Iran and some 300,000 in the Thai-Kampuchea border and a flow of people from Vietnam.

LITTLEJOHNS: And all these come under the purview, receive assistance from UNHCR?

OGATA: Yes, some - more protection, others assistance, a great deal of assistance.

LITTLEJOHNS: And your Agency relies entirely on voluntary contributions?

OGATA: Almost entirely on voluntary contributions.

LITTLEJOHNS: What sort of a budget do you have?

OGATA: Well, this year, we had an unprecedentedly high budget of 980 million but we have also had an unprecedented response, that is some 780 million, which means that the magnitude of the problem has really been unprecedented. At the same time, governments and the public have responded in trying to help us.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is it possible to say that the numbers have peaked or are they continuing to rise? You said 17 million.

OGATA: I hope I can say that the number has peaked but I cannot say for certain because one thing is that refugee outflows you really cannot predict so accurately, but I hope I can say that the number is peaking because for example, in the Horn of Africa, especially Ethiopia, the long civil war has ended and there is now a reconciliation attempt. People are going home and also in other places in the world, there are reconciliation negotiations which means people are beginning to go back and if this really works out, I might be able to say it's peaking.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is this phenomenon mainly the result of political factors?

OGATA: Oh yes. I think the main reason why people are beginning

to go back is that these long conflict situations, the end of the Cold War has had some impact on the end of conflict and move towards reconciliation.

LITTLEJOHNS: So hopefully, 17 million may be the peak.

OGATA: I hope so very much.

MENON: Mrs. Ogata, you said you hope that it's peaked but if you look at the political picture of the world and how we're evolving from the Cold War into a kind of new world order - whatever that might be - wouldn't you say that as countries jockey for position, refugees will become increasingly pawns and will be seen as ways of exerting pressure in this international jockeying?

OGATA: I think there are two trends possible - one is that with the end of the Cold War, many of the internal wars or conflicts have been settled or on the way to being settled and this is reflected in the peace prospects in whether it's Kampuchea or Ethiopia, many other places like that. At the same time, because the super power influence has gone down, the indigenous, nationalistic, ethnic, religious and other conflicts are coming out and there is no really strong power to suppress. And in that sense, maybe the United Nations might be asked to play a bigger role and so in the transitional period towards the new world order which I hope will be coming out, I think there are possibilities of increase; there are possibilities of decrease. This is why I cannot predict.

MENON: You left out Europe in your account of refugee flows. In fact, there are sizable flows at the moment.

OGATA: No, in numerical terms, it's about a million at the

most, I think, but some are refugees, many of them are migrant workers and this is the new trend, the mixture of refugee and various other movements of people. And the task right now is to see how you can respond to the diverse needs of people who decide to leave.

LITTLEJOHNS: Many of these, I suppose, are sort of economic refugees?

OGATA: Yes, these are people who leave their country in search of better economic opportunities but very often, they come as asylum seekers because this is the only way to enter into the various countries in the West. And so, the task now for many governments in western countries is to have ways of defining who qualifies as an asylum seeker and who doesn't and this has become a very big strain on the institution of asylum too.

MENKES: So maybe, Madame, then you can give us a legal definition of refugee - how UNHCR looks at this problem.

OGATA: UNHCR - the basis of the legal mandate that we have is the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. At the same time, the Secretary-General, the General Assembly resolutions have given us many, many additional mandates so we have a fairly wide range of mandates but I think also the OAU Convention on Refugees; there is the Cartagena Declaration relating to refugees - they deal more with wars, conflicts, represent governments and so on. But I would say most of those who come under my mandate are those who are fleeing for political reasons.

MENKES: I wanted to ask you about the situation in the Soviet Union - my country. In recent years, there has been millions of displaced persons there. I understand they were not

considered to be refugees then but what is going to happen now when, instead of the old Soviet Union, we shall have the Union of Independent States?

OGATA: Well, if the Union of Independent States, those who are displaced from a republic which is independent, might need international protection, in which case, they would become refugees. So, this is very much a transitional period in which the movement of people among republics depending on the relationship among republics, could become a need for international protection, in which case, they would be refugees.

NGUYEN: In the case of the refugees from Vietnam, you were talking about voluntary repatriation but when you deal with these kinds of refugees who fled their countries mostly for economic reasons, can voluntary repatriation be a solution for them?

OGATA: Well, you raise a very difficult question because I think the case of Vietnam typifies the kind of problems that we're facing and may face more in other parts of the world because here was a country where, with a change of the régime, there were many people who fled for political reasons and they were given recognition as asylum seekers and they were resettled in many parts of the world. But increasingly, the flow of people became characterized by those who were seeking economic opportunities and therefore, there was a conference that took place in 1989 about people fleeing from Vietnam and there was some agreement among the first asylum countries to screen them and there were these methods of determining their status that was established and those who were screened out - those who are determined not to qualify as refugees were to be sent back. But, in sending them back, they were to be sent back voluntarily. The problem has been that not everybody who has been screened out has opted to go back and there were in some

places like in Hong Kong, there is a great accumulation of people which has been a very serious problem. I think this Vietnamese problem has given us a lesson that says that determining the status of a mixed group of people who flow out of countries is a very important one and we have to establish the right kind of mechanisms but in sending them back or even among those who do not qualify and go back, we are given the role to monitor what happens after they go
back. Are they persecuted or is there any danger? And we have a new protection role in that sense of monitoring those who are not qualified as refugees but who went back because the cause of the outflow had been a bit complex.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE.** Our guest is Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

NGUYEN: I'd like to ask you, how do you apply the lessons drawn from the boat people from Vietnam? When do you apply protection and when do you apply assistance to the refugees? Let's take the case of Albania, moving from southeast Asia to Europe - you will have to in the future. How do you view the situation where thousands of Albanians were pushed back into the countries?

OGATA: Well, there is a lot of similarity between the Vietnamese case and the Albanian case in the sense that there was a repressive régime which became increasingly more open but the economy of these two countries was very weak and therefore, people continued to leave the country for other than political reasons. In the case of Albania, we have also established a presence in Albania to monitor those who have been sent back - whether they have been punished because they had left and so on and we have this new kind of assuring the rights of those who went back and I think this is the kind of thing we will have to improvise more and more

because many people who left Albania in the summer, for example, do not qualify as refugees because there was not the persecution or repressive pressure from a repressive régime that sent them but it was the miserable economic conditions maybe caused by some political management in the past. There may be a connection between the current economy and the régime in the past but it's not the political reasons that are primarily sending people out. And it's a very very difficult situation for us to cope with; it's a very new one.

MENON: A few months ago, UNHCR reached an agreement with the government of South Africa on the return of exiles. Where does that stand?

OGATA: Well, we carried on a very difficult negotiation for over 500 days. The main point was that we were asking for a general amnesty for all the political exiles and this was finally accepted. We have sent already a technical mission to establish our presence there and by the end of the month, we'll be sending more than 10 people to start helping these people back to South Africa.

MENKES: Madame, tell us please, who are your leading donors? What countries are the leading donors?

OGATA: The largest donor has been the United States. The second largest is Japan. The third largest is EC - the European Community. Fourth, fifth will be countries like Sweden, England, Germany.

MENKES: How do you raise the funds in general?

OGATA: Working very hard for one thing. But I think we

have to be funded for our general programmes which are the programmes we can predict reasonably for the next year and for that, most donors know what our needs are but there are many refugee outflows that come up suddenly like the Kurdish case this year. The Iraqi refugees' case was something nobody predicted and so for that however, the needs were understood very well and the governments did come in with a lot of help. We sent out appeals, we followed up our appeals, talked about it trying to convince governments and also the public. I think that's important.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Ogata, we've spoken about a large sum of money, 980 million. How do you use this money? I mean, we've spoken in general terms about UNHCR but how, in the field so to speak, do you handle your budgets?

OGATA: The largest amount of money that goes in is really for the care and maintenance of refugees in camps. Most of them are in camps but in Africa, for example, the African communities are very generous and many of them have taken people into their own villages and homes even. This is found in western Africa. But it's really that the largest amount goes for care and maintenance, transport of food, medical services.

LITTLEJOHNS: Medical services? Education?

OGATA: Very often we cannot go that far. I am someone who has been in education all my life and would really like to see the education factor much more strengthened but with the money we have this year, it might sound large, but the number of people being taken care of is enormous and very often we cannot really take care of the educational part. Some of the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) come in and do the educational part which I appreciate very much.

NGUYEN: The 1990s is considered the decade of migrants, mostly migrant workers. I'd like to ask you, is it easier to have a solution in the case of the migrant workers or political asylum seekers - refugees who fled the country for political reasons? Because the principle of first asylum is applied only to political seekers not migrant workers. Which is the easier one for you to handle?

OGATA: Migrants do not exactly come under my mandate but at least I can say that with the political asylum seekers, there is an international legal framework of non-réfoulement, the obligations of the first countries of asylum. We come and protect them; there is a fairly well established care and maintenance programme and so on. But with the case of the migrant workers, I do not think this legal framework has been established. In that sense, maybe more examining would be required.

NGUYEN: Would you be willing to go to the General Assembly and expand your mandate?

OGATA: No, I don't think so because my mandate is given by the General Assembly. I can explain the problems but I think the question of migration relates much more to economic opportunities, employment opportunities, immigration problems which really go beyond what we are ready to assume obligations as an organization. But the question of the internally-displaced, for example, which does not necessarily fall under our mandate, we have taken care of the internally-displaced when they are together with refugees in various countries.

MENON: The UN has been criticized for not having a coherent enough response to emergencies when they come up and there were some proposals for increasing the coherence of the system. What do

you see as the major problem?

OGATA: Well, in some cases we may not have been efficient enough but I think in many cases, it's because of the complexity of the case. We had maybe three big emergencies so far this year - Bangladesh, Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa - every one is different and requires very different approaches. Now if it's a natural disaster, I think with good preparation, you can go in and solve the problem much more swiftly than situations that involve internal wars and complex political negotiations and I think those things have to be taken into consideration before saying we're efficient or not.

MENKES: So which is the largest operation which you have now?

OGATA: In terms of money?

MENKES: Money and people-wise also.

OGATA: As far as a single country goes, I would say Ethiopia is very large.

MENKES: Tell us, Madame, what is your success story - the most successful operation, say in recent couple of years?

OGATA: I think region-wise, maybe Central America. We are successful when we can close our accounts and when we can close our offices. That's our success. And perhaps Central America, there are more successes that I can count. I shall be going to Costa Rica and shall be closing a camp very soon.

LITTLEJOHNS: A camp occupied by refugees from Nicaragua?

OGATA: That is a success.

NGUYEN: With the settlement of the Cambodian conflict, how soon do you think the Cambodians can go home and probably an end of the Vietnamese exodus?

OGATA: I think now it is on the agenda, how soon it will be will depend a great deal on the decisions in the United Nations. The political agreement seems to be around the corner and that is a very hopeful sign. What kind of structures would be agreed by the United Nations and so on. Let's say it's coming nearer.

MENON: Refugees as I talked about earlier were often pawns, political pawns. To what extent do you find governments actively militating against the solution of refugee problems?

OGATA: Refugees depend on government protection. At the same time, refugees are sometimes outcomes of government policies as you say. It's a very difficult question you ask. I can only say that the part played by the government is always crucial.

MENON: But to what extent is your problem a political one rather than an economic or humanitarian one?

OGATA: My problem is humanitarian, but in order to get the humanitarian principles through, you always have to go through political considerations and consultations. For example, in a war-torn area, if there are refugees, I would have to insist on governments to let our assistance go through war-torn areas and that requires political discussions, negotiations for the sake of humanitarian objectives.

MENON: A few of your people were killed.

OGATA: Unfortunately, in Somalia and in Ethiopia, altogether six of our staff lost their lives.

LITTLEJOHNS: Madame High Commissioner, you spoke about the refugees in Hong Kong. The British have been trying to forcibly repatriate a lot of those refugees and they've come under some criticism including, I think, from the United States. What is the attitude of UNHCR?

OGATA: The refugees - they come out as refugees after status determination. The ones in Hong Kong, many of them are those who have been disqualified as refugees. I think the question is how do you send back people who are not refugees and I think, how do you use the most humane ways to send back people who do not belong there.

LITTLEJOHNS: And that's something you're looking into?

OGATA: No, we are observing and counselling but I think there the question is really between the British and the Vietnamese right now.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mrs. Ogata, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

Our guest has been Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

She was interviewed here at the United Nations Headquarters in New York by Bhaskar Menon of PTI-TV of India; Evgueni Menkes of TASS and; Tuyet Nguyen of United Press

International.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

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